

## **The Challenge before India and Pakistan - Dialogue - an Imperative**

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September 11 - New York, October 1 - Srinagar, and December 13 - New Delhi, are all familiar dates in recent history. Whilst the first ended in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan by the International Coalition led by the United States, the latter two events have almost resulted in a war between India and Pakistan - two nuclear weapon capable states, who also share a long and volatile common border of some three thousand kilometers. In addition, both countries also lack effective command, control, communication and intelligence systems and their absence makes the whole nuclear weapons management that much more sensitive, accident prone, and therefore dangerous.

What follows is an attempt to discuss the dynamics of this very complex situation and the impact of the United States military presence in the region.

India and Pakistan came into existence from the erstwhile British colony in 1947. Unfortunately, the partition of India was based on religious grounds, which has been the source of continuing animosity between the two countries. It would be worth mentioning in this context that India, with a population of almost 130 million Muslims, is also the second largest Muslim country in the world after Indonesia. The root cause of the many problems that face the Indian sub-continent today, including Jammu and Kashmir, can perhaps be attributed to this background. Without going into the history of the problem, suffice it to say that there is an urgent need for India and Pakistan to find a viable solution that is acceptable to the people of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, which now stands physically divided between India and Pakistan.

The involvement of the United States in Afghanistan, and the use of Pakistan as a logistics base for its military operations there, has also to be factored in into this discussion as it is a matter of some concern in the region. At the same time, greater U.S. presence in Central and South Asia as a sequel to the "war against terror" is not a positive development in terms of regional stability and peace. There are indications that U.S. presence in this region will be of a longish duration. This may trigger a new demand for other forms of emerging strategic partnerships and the possible commencement of a Cold War II - with the U.S. and the West on the one hand, and China, Russia and India on the other.

Terrorist attacks on the U.S. and India have brought these two nations closer together in addressing the common enemy of terrorism. At the same time, the U.S. is deeply indebted to Pakistan for General Musharraf's courageous stand against the Taliban and the use of bases in Pakistan for its current operations.

India had been highlighting the dangers of terrorism to the international community since the early nineties, and had also identified its main source to be located in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Such warnings fell on deaf ears, and only 9-11 made the world community fully appreciate this. Despite both India and Pakistan belonging to the international coalition against terrorism, being signatories to the UN Security Council Resolutions 1368 and 1373 condemning the attacks of September 11, and reaffirming their commitment to work together to eliminate the threat of terrorism, the attacks on India of October 1 and December 13 were too much for India to accept. This has resulted in the current eyeball to eyeball confrontation between the armed forces of the two countries along their borders. A huge diplomatic offensive was mounted by India against Pakistan to cease cross-border terrorism and return the twenty terrorists that India claimed were on their wanted list. The danger of war breaking out between these two adversaries over a month ago was very real indeed. Considering that both were nuclear weapon capable states, it was not surprising that the international community, including the U.S., took more than a normal interest in this very dangerous development.

Despite all this apparent hostility between the two countries at official levels, peoples groups and peace coalitions on both sides of the border had been continuing their efforts with their respective governments to avoid war and to resume a dialogue. Diplomatic interventions at the highest levels from various countries have supplemented the ongoing efforts by a range of civil society groups to ensure restraint. Indeed the recent visit to the U.S. by General Musharraf, President of Pakistan, reaffirms the lowering of tensions.

Domestic compulsions both in India and Pakistan have given rise to much of the recent rhetoric exchanged between the two countries. In the case of Pakistan, this was to manage its radical turn around against Taliban and the fundamentalist Islamic groups, whereas in India this was largely determined by the impending elections to the state assemblies in four states including the largest one of Uttar Pradesh.

General Musharraf's courageous address of twelfth January included the banning of two groups identified by India as being responsible for attacks on its democratic institutions. The General's plan to contain fundamentalism and terrorism within Pakistan and also to stop their carrying out terrorist activities outside Pakistan, including in Jammu and Kashmir, was well received in both government and civil society circles in India and elsewhere. However, the Government of India still maintains that these commitments made by General Musharraf have not been translated into action on the ground and therefore the question of a dialogue does not arise at present.

Gen. Musharraf followed this up with his offer to enter into a 'no-war' pact with India, and to discuss the de-nuclearisation of South Asia. "Unfortunately, this offer to discuss nuclear matters has been rejected by the Government of India," said Admiral Ramdas. "Similarly, timing of the test of the Agni II solid-fuelled rocket was inadvisable and unfortunate.

Given the present scene, it is abundantly clear that both India and Pakistan must do everything possible to ensure a return to normalcy at the earliest date. Despite three well meant agreements between the two countries - namely the Tashkent Declaration - 1965; the Simla Agreement - 1972; and the Lahore Declaration of 1998, wherein both countries had agreed to settle all their outstanding issues only by peaceful means - they failed to do so. This has been mainly due to the absence of a neutral monitoring and implementation authority, which needs now to be put in place to ensure that the next agreement, whenever it materialises, does not meet the same fate as the rest before it. Perhaps a few countries within the SAARC could perform this role. It is therefore recommended that both countries should implement the following as soon as possible.

Pakistan to cease cross border infiltration and support to terrorism India to restore communication links including air, land, and rail transport, and return its High Commissioner to Islamabad Defuse and de-escalate the current eyeball to eyeball confrontation along the international border and the line of control Resume the dialogue process as soon as possible, especially on the nuclear question and all other issues including Jammu and Kashmir. Establish an implementation and monitoring agency concurrently with any fresh agreement to ensure its adherence by both the signatories.

Pakistan and India are at a crossroad where they have to choose between peace and development against death and destruction. They have already fought three and a half wars and have nothing to show for it. They continue to incur astronomical expenses on defense. The nuclear and missile development programs have made matters much worse. If Pakistan does not stop its cross border terrorism and India does not grasp this opportunity to engage in a dialogue, there is every chance that the International community may lose its patience and decide to intervene in an appropriate manner that may not be palatable to both these countries. So let us TALK, TALK, TALK and very soon.